

THE NEW ENGLAND
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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LEAFLET
NO. 80

REPORT OF THE
COMMITTEE ON METHODS

APRIL 1
1910

REPORT OF THE MARCH MEETING

The present editor finds his keenest initial pleasure in publishing the following resolutions offered by Mr. D. O. S. Lowell, seconded by Mr. Byron Groce, and enthusiastically indorsed by all the members present.

RESOLUTIONS OF APPRECIATION OF THE WORK OF GEORGE
H. BROWNE

Whereas, The New England Association of Teachers of English is now in its tenth year;
and

Whereas, during all that period George H. Browne has been its Secretary, and most of the time its Secretary-Treasurer; and

Whereas, to-day, much to our regret Mr. Browne resigns his office; therefore be it

Resolved, That the success of this Association during all these years has been mainly due to the versatility, enthusiasm, and untiring labors of Mr. Browne.

Resolved, That while Presidents have come and Presidents have gone, the fact that the Secretary has gone on forever — until now — has given the necessary stability that an important body like ours demands, and has accordingly won the confidence of English teachers throughout New England.

Resolved, That it is with profound regret that we find Mr. Browne unshaken in his determination to lay down the onerous labors of his position.

Resolved, That this Association extend its heartfelt thanks to the retiring Secretary, assuring him that the impetus which he has given to English teaching throughout New England and elsewhere will, in our belief, outlast even this Association, though we expect that that, too, will return late to heaven.

Resolved, That these resolutions be spread upon our records, and that a copy thereof be presented to Mr. Browne.

The time of the meeting was occupied principally with the reading and discussion of the report of the committee on methods, which took as its particular task the investigation of the *Present Conditions in the Teaching of English*. Mr. Henry W. Holmes, the chairman of

the committee, has furnished for this leaflet an abstract of the report which comprehends the answers to the *Twenty Questions* sent out in November, 1909, and reprinted here for the convenience of the members.

1. Name and Official Position. (School, Town, Course, Year.) College graduate?
Of what college class?
2. No. of pupils in school? Of what nationalities and antecedents? Approximately what per cent. of your pupils go to college? How large do your classes run? (Smallest, average, largest.) Boys, Girls, or both?
3. Do your pupils come to the high school with a good training in English? Do they know English grammar? Are their habits of speech correct? Are there many backward, dull or retarded pupils in your classes? Do you give them special work?
4. How many periods a week do you teach? How many periods do you teach English? What other subjects do you teach? How long is a period?
5. Have you a single unified course in English, or several such courses? Who made it (them)? Will you send us printed outlines?
6. Is English prescribed for all pupils? What English, if any, is elective?
7. How many periods a week are allotted to English in each year?
8. Is the English course for non-college pupils the same as that for college pupils? Are they taught separately or together?
9. Do courses (such as the Commercial, Technical, Classical) vary as to English? How?
10. Is there a distinct course in the history of English literature? In what years? How closely is English history correlated with English literature?
11. How much of your total time for English is devoted to literature? How much to composition? (approximately).
12. Do you teach grammar? business correspondence? spelling? oral composition? When? How much?
13. Do your pupils often read aloud in class? Do you read aloud to your pupils?
14. How much outside reading do your pupils do for you? How do you credit it? How is it done?
15. How often do your pupils write? How often in class? On literary or non-literary topics most? Do you prescribe many of the topics? How are the compositions corrected? Are they rewritten?
16. What books do your classes study that are not commonly studied? Why? If we write to you, can you tell us of some interesting devices, methods, or plans? Can you tell us who can?

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the report centered around two topics, — (1) oral compositions, and (2) the availability of the college requirements for the technical and the commercial group of pupils.

The importance which the committee attached to oral composition was clearly apparent. On inquiry from one of the members, the significance of the term and the practices of certain teachers were explained. Effective oral composition demands on the part of the pupil an ability to organize his thoughts on a certain topic so that he may stand before his class and talk intelligently for a definite time — usually three or four minutes. Mr. Gallagher spoke of the quick reaction from the class criticism. Mr. Hanson told of the interest which his boys often took in describing a bit of mechanism in which they chanced to be interested. So effective did certain of the pupils become that on different occasions a boy had held the attention of the whole school through a forty-five minute talk. Mr. Lowell spoke of the good results obtained by limiting the pupils to one minute discussions.

Opinion 7, as phrased by Mr. Holmes, drew the fire of Mr. Thurber. Mr. Thurber thinks that teachers of technical and commercial classes should depart freely from the college list. Such a book as Parton's *Captains of Industry*, or Hyde's *School Reader*, supplies a real, practical need. Prof. Neilson differed decidedly. The very fact that a boy or girl is not going to college is ample justification for giving him that cultural reading which his later environment will deny or fail to encourage. Mr. Groce reinforced Prof. Neilson's view by emphasizing the fact that we are not doing enough to inspire a healthy reach in our pupils. We should be vitally concerned in developing a taste. Evidently Mr. Groce does not teach his pupils what Professor Courthope taught his Oxford audience — *De gustibus non disputandum*.

— THE EDITOR.

The Association elected the following list of officers for the ensuing year.

PROF. JAMES A. TUFTS, *President*.
The Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, N. H.

PROF. WILLIAM A. NEILSON, *Vice-President*.
Harvard University.

SAMUEL THURBER, JR., *Secretary-Treasurer*.
Technical High School, Newton.

CHARLES SWAIN THOMAS, *Editor*.
Newton High School.

Members of Executive Committee

MR. OSCAR C. GALLAGHER.
Boston High School of Commerce.

MISS KATE STANLEY.
Technical High School, Springfield.

MR. FRANK W. C. HERSEY.
Instructor in English, Harvard University.

MISS LAURA E. RICHARDSON.
Girls' High School, Boston.

to them poorly trained; nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ say they do not "know grammar"; nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ say they have not correct habits of speech. *OPINION 6: The high school teacher ought to know what is done in the elementary school — especially; he ought to be asked to help in making out the elementary school course. Grammar can best be systematized in the high school, and should serve then as a basis for all work in the languages. Not enough work is done for backward, dull, and retarded pupils. Only 13 schools differentiate the college course from the non-college course. OPINION 7: They do not need to be differentiated in our subject. Intellectual capacity — more than the special life aim — should guide our procedure. The college requirements are broad enough — at last. They leave room for plenty of work adapted to special interests. "The method that gets the class should do for the college." Have the courage to teach the college books as you think they ought to be taught, and the examinations will take care of themselves. Eighty schools have a separate course in the history of English Literature, mostly in the 4th year. 35 schools give $\frac{1}{2}$ the English time to literature; 53 schools give less than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the English time to composition. OPINION 8: Other things equal, — composition should have $\frac{1}{2}$ of the time. Consciously directed, zealous and unremitting practice is necessary for the formation of complex and important habits. Over $\frac{1}{2}$ the schools teach grammar, usually in the 1st year; about $\frac{1}{3}$ business correspondence; nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ spelling ("incidentally"); nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ oral composition; 111 teachers read to their pupils; 113 have the pupils read aloud in class. OPINION 9: Oral work is very valuable indeed. 80 schools have the pupils do outside reading; most of them test it by written reports. OPINION 10: Outside reading is valuable, but it should be tested in such a way as not to make it a bugbear; its purpose is expansion. 106 teachers have their pupils write once a week or oftener; 45 teachers have them write once a week or oftener in class. OPINION 11: To form style while it is actually in the making, nothing is better than to go from desk to desk working with the pupils as they write. Have them write in many cases as an artist sketches — for technique, and with a definite point in mind. Most of the schools favor non-literary topics; most of them prescribe a good many of the topics. OPINION 12: Too wide a range of choice confuses young minds; for the practice-effect of composition, which should be part of the pupils' conscious aim, special subjects may often be necessary; topics from other high school subjects may profitably be assigned or suggested. In most cases the teachers correct themes carefully. Many let the class help. (It is evident from the replies to the pupil list that oral corrections and conferences are more effective than written ones.) Most teachers have pupils rewrite themes, many only if poor. OPINION 13: Rewriting is often less valuable than writing another on the same topic with special points for improvement well in mind. It is evident that in $\frac{3}{4}$ of the schools less credit is given for exams. than for other work. Books not commonly read are: Lowell, *Democracy*, *On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners*; Wister, *U. S. Grant*; Schurz, *Lincoln*; Parton, *Captains of Industry*; Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, *Fors Clavigera*; Burroughs, *Essays*; Hyde, *School Reader*; The Bible. (The college list seems to contain most of the books that are really valuable for high school pupils to read.) — FINAL OPINION: In these 110 schools, the English work seems to be fairly well conceived; there is room for improvement.*

— HENRY W. HOLMES.

17. Do you use a text-book in Rhetoric? What book? In what year? Do you use a grammar? a spelling book? a book of selections, a reader, or an anthology?
18. What aids to English teaching have you? Library? Reference books? Individual dictionaries? Debating? Dramatics? School paper? Prizes? Are you restricted in your choice of editions? Have most of your text-books notes?
19. Is there any coöperation between the English department and the other departments? Of what sort? Does the English department meet? Is there any local English teachers' club?
20. Is English examined as often and in the same way as other subjects? How much do examinations count as against class work and themes? How detailed a record of work do you keep? Have you a special scheme for it?

REPLIES TO THE TWENTY QUESTIONS SENT TO TEACHERS IN NEW ENGLAND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Questions and explanation sent out as Leaflet 76, Nov. 5, 1909. Replies from 129 teachers, representing 110 schools. 78 (about $\frac{3}{4}$) came from public schools. Only 8 from technical, commercial, and classical schools. 46 from Mass.; 20 from Me.; 8 or 9 from each of the other N. E. States. Schools on the whole, small; $\frac{2}{3}$ between 200 and 600, $\frac{1}{2}$ under 250. 104 of the teachers college graduates, most since '94 (Harvard and Radcliffe 19, Wellesley 15, Smith 11, Boston Univ. 9, others scattering). Pupils of varied nationalities, antecedents, and training. 100 classes mixed; 19 boys only; 14 girls. **OPINION 1:** *A mixed class is a disadvantage, but not an insuperable obstacle.* Over $\frac{1}{4}$ of the schools send less than 5 % of their pupils to college; almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of them send less than 50 %; only 6 schools send all or nearly all. The average class contains 22 pupils, 60 % run between 20 and 30. **OPINION 2:** *Large classes do more harm in English than in other subjects because the relation demanded between pupil and teacher is so personal; but the general conditions appear to be excellent.* One third of the teachers teach 5 or 6 periods a day, over $\frac{1}{3}$ teach $3\frac{1}{2}$ to $4\frac{1}{2}$ a day; periods are usually 40 or 45 minutes. **OPINION 3:** *Four periods a day, 20 a week, is the best an English teacher ought to ask for under present conditions.* The average teaching time given to English is 18 pds. a week; 20 teachers give it 25; 15 give it 20. **OPINION 4:** *The English teacher will not soon be relieved of the drudgery of elementary drill in composition; "incidental" attention to good habits of speech and writing will not produce them; the higher technique of writing, and literature, demand the specialist — with an educational consciousness; hence the English teacher should give all, or nearly all, his time to English.* 70 of the 129 do give all their time to English. Only 12 teach more than 2 other subjects. The average number of recitation periods given to English is 4.17. **OPINION 5:** *Four periods a week for 4 years ought to leave any English department at least resigned.* English is prescribed for all pupils in all but 2 schools. Some extra elective courses in upper classes. Excellent supply of aids, — libraries, debates, prizes, etc. Only 11 teachers are restricted in their choice of editions. Just $\frac{2}{3}$ have a single, unified course; but the teacher helped to make it in less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the cases. Coöperation means to most of the writers merely a friendly relation between departments; very few report good workable schemes (see Mr. Gallagher's recent leaflet). 39 schools reported no department meetings. Over $\frac{1}{2}$ say their pupils come

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